

Message Text

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R 231640Z JAN 78
FM AMEMBASSY ROME
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 087
INFO AMCONSUL FLORENCE
AMCONSUL GENOA
AMCONSUL MILAN
AMCONSUL NAPLES
AMCONSUL PALERMO
AMCONSUL TRIESTE POUCH
AMCONSUL TURIN POUCH

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SUBJECT: CATHOLIC SUCCESS IN SCHOOL ELECTION IN ITALY

SUMMARY. ON DECEMBER 11 AND 12, 1977, ELECTIONS WERE HELD TO ELECT PARENT, STUDENT, AND TEACHER REPRESENTATIVES TO ADVISORY SCHOOL COUNCILS AT THE PROVINCIAL AND DISTRICT LEVELS. WHILE THE POSTS FOR WHICH THESE ELCTIONS WERE HELD ARE NOT VERY IMPORTANT, BOTH THE CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATIC AND COMMUNIST PARTIES CONSIDERED THE ELECTIONS TO BE AN IMPORTANT TEST OF PUBLIC OPINION. THE ELECTORATE LISTS WERE NOT DRAWN UP ALONG STRICT PARTY LINES, BUT RATHER WERE DRAWN UP LOCALLY, BY LIKE-MINDED GROUPS OF CANDIDATES. NATIONWIDE, GROUPS WHICH RAN UNDER THE CATHOLIC BANNER WON A SURPRISINGLY LARGE PERCENTAGE OF THE VOTE. MOST OBSERVERS EXPECTED THAT THE LEFTIST-ORIENTED LISTS WOULD DO MUCH BETTER THAN THEY DID, GIVEN THE SUPPOSEDLY

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SUPERIOR LEFTIST ORGANIZATION AT THE LOCAL LEVEL, THE ASSUMED LEFTIST ORIENTATION OF A LARGE PORTION OF THE NATION'S STUDENTS, AND THE LARGE WEEL-ORGANIZED PROMOTIONAL EFFORTS OF THE LEFT TO GET OUT THE VOTE FOR LEFTIST SLATES. END SUMMARY.

1. ON DECEMBER 11 AND 12 UNDER A LAW WHICH WAS PASSED

BY PARLIAMENT IN JULY 1973, ELECTIONS WERE HELD FOR THE FIRST TIME TO ELECT PARENT, TEACHER, AND STUDENT REPRESENTATIVES TO ADVISORY SCHOOL COUNCILS IN 93 PROVINCES AND 740 DISTRICTS. THESE COUNCILS WILL HAVE THE POWER TO ISSUE OPINIONS AND TO GIVE ADVICE ON A WIDE RANGE OF SUBJECTS (SUCH AS CHOOSING TEXT BOOKS AND DECIDING ON CURRICULUMS) TO THE GOVERNMENT ADMINISTRATIVES WHO RUN THE SCHOOL SYSTEMS. THE ELECTORAL LISTS WERE NOT PUT UP BY THE PARTIES, BUT WERE DRAWN UP BY THE UNIONS, AND LOCAL GROUPS OF PARENTS, TEACHERS, AND STUDENTS. BECAUSE THERE WERE LITERALLY HUNDREDS OF THESE LISTS, NEARLY ALL WITH LOCAL OR DIFFERENT NAMES, THE TASK OF COLLATING THE RETURNS NATIONWIDE HAS BEEN VERY DIFFICULT AND, INDEED, IS NOT YET COMPLETE.

2. AVAILABLE RESULTS INDICATE THAT CATHOLIC-ORIENTED SLATES FARED UNUSUALLY WELL IN THE BALLOTING, AN INDICATION OF THE CONTINUED STRENGTH OF THE CATHOLIC SENTIMENT IN ITALY AS WELL AS EVIDENCE THAT CATHOLIC GROUPS ARE AGAIN ACTIVE AT THE GRASS ROOTS. THE LEFTIST GROUPS HAD BEEN EXPECTED TO DO VERY WELL GIVEN THEIR GENERALLY RECOGNIZED SUPERIOR LOCAL ORGANIZATION, LEFTIST PRESS SUPPORT AND LEFT-PARTY FINANCING. HOWEVER, IN THE SCHOOLS, WHERE THE COMMUNISTS HAD HOPED TO SHOW GREAT STRENGTH, THE STUDENTS AND TEACHERS GAVE CATHOLIC GROUPS A LARGE MEASURE OF SUPPORT. FOR EXAMPLE, AMONG HIGH SCHOOL TEACHERS THE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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CATHOLIC UNIONS, (UCIIM ETC.), TOTALED 29 PERCENT OF THE VOTE, THE CONSERVATIVE, NON-COMMUNIST SNALS GOT 27 PERCENT, AND COMBINED UCIIM AND SNALS GROUPS RECEIVED 9 PERCENT. THIS LEFT ONLY 11 PERCENT FOR THE COMBINED LIST OF THE CONFEDERATED UNIONS CGIL (COMMUNIST), CISL (CATHOLIC), AND UIL (SOCIALIST). WHERE THE CHIL AND THE UIL RAN TOGETHER THEY RECEIVED 12 PERCENT AND THE CGIL ALONE RECEIVED ONLY 7 PERCENT.

3. NATIONWIDE AMONG ALL PARENTS, VARIOUS CATHOLIC GROUPS RECIEVED A TOTAL OF 56 PERCENT OKWTHE VALID VOTES CAST. LAY LISTS RECEIVED 5 PERCENT OF THE VALID VOTES, AND THE COMBINED LEFTIST GROUPS RECIEVED 34 PERCENT. INTERESTINGLY, 19 PERCENT OF ALL VOTES CAST BY PARENTS WERE INVALID. PART OF THE PRESS HAS SPECULATED THAT THE LARGE NUMBER OF INVALID VOTES CAME FROM CATHOLIC VOTERS WHO, LIVING IN LOCALITIES THAT ONLY OFFERED LEFTIST LISTS, TURNED IN BLANK BALLOTS RATHER THAN VOTE FOR THE LEFT. IT IS POSSIBLE, THEREFORE, THAT THE NUBER OF PARENTS WHO WISHED TO VOTE FOR CATHOLIC LISTS MAY HAVE BEEN ABOVE THE 56 PERCENT THAT THEY ACTUALLY RECIEVED. ON THE OTHER HAND, THERE HAS ALSO BEEN SOME PRESS SPECULATION THAT THE LARGE NUMBER OF INVALID VOTES WAS CAUSED BY THE COMPLEXITY OF THE BALLOT.

4. STUDENTS WERE ONLY ALLOWED TO VOTE IN THE DISTRICT ELECTIONS. NEITHER THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION NOR ANY OF THE POLITICAL PARTIES HAVE YET BEEN ABLE TO COLLATE THE RETURNS FROM THE STUDENTS ON A NATIONAL BASIS. PARTIAL RETURNS SHOW THAT, AS EXPECTED, MANY STUDENTS VOTED FOR THE LEFT, BUT OVER 40 PERCENT VOTED FOR CATHOLIC LISTS. PARTIAL RESULTS OF THE STUDENT BALLOTING ARE: COMBINED LEFT - 36 PERCENT; CATHOLIC LISTS - 40 PERCENT; LAY - 2 PERCENT; 10 PERCENT ULTRA-LEFT AND 12 PERCENT ULTRA-RIGHT.

5. COMMENT. THE RESULTS OF THESE ELECTIONS POINT UP THE STRENGTH OF THE CATHOLIC ORIENTATION IN ITALY. IT WAS A VICTORY FOR THE CATHOLIC-ORIENTED GROUPS AND THE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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CATHOLIC AND NON-COMMUNIST UNIONS. THE RESULTS MUST BE CONSIDERED A MIXED BLESSING FOR THE CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATIC PARTY (DC). IT IS CLEAR THAT THERE ARE STILL IN ITALY A VERY LARGE NUMBER OF PARENTS, TEACHERS, AND STUDENTS WHO ARE BOTH CATHOLIC AND NON-COMMUNIST, ALTHOUGH THESE WILL NOT NECESSARILY VOTE DC IN A POLITICAL ELECTIONS, PART OF THE CATHOLIC VOTE, PARTICULARLY AMONG THE PARENTS, COULD BE INTERPRETED AS A CONSERVATIVE BACKLASH AGAINST INCREASING DISORDERED AND DECREASINGLY STRUCTURED ITALIAN SCHOOL SYSTEM. THE STUDENTS NEVERTHELESS STILL INCLUDE A SUBSTANTIAL EXTREMIST ELEMENT SINCE THE COMBINED VOTE FOR THE ULTRA-LEFT AND ULTRA-RIGHT WAS 22 PERCENT.

6. PARTY REACTIONS HAVE BEEN RELATIVELY FEW AND LOW-KEY. THE DC AND CONSERVATIVE PRESS HAVE LABELED THE RESULTS A VICTORY FOR THE CATHOLIC-ORIENTED LISTS BUT HAVE NOT MADE ANY SERIOUS ATTEMPT TO EXPLOIT THIS APPARENT VICTORY. SINCE THE DC LEADERSHIP IS ENGAGED IN AN ATTEMPT TO NEGOTIATE A SOLUTION TO THE CURRENT POLITICAL CRISIS THAT WILL AVOID EARLY ELECTIONS, IT CLEARLY DOES NOT WISH TO EXACERBATE POLITICAL TENSIONS BY RAISING THE LEVEL OF CONFRONTATION WITH THE PCI. ON THE OTHER HAND, MANY DC LEADERS (INCLUDING THE YOUNG REFORM GROUP) HAVE PRIVATELY EXPRESSED THE VIEW THAT THE RESULTS ARE POLITICALLY SIGNIFICANT AND REFLECT A GROWING CONSERVATIVE TREND AMONG THE VOTING POPULACE.

7. THE LEFT AS A WHOLE, AND PARTICULARLY THE COMMUNISTS, ADMITTED SOME SURPRISE THAT THE VOTE WENT AS IT DID. TRYING TO PUT THE BEST FACE ON THE SITUATION, THE LEFT EMPHASIZED THAT FACT THAT ITS LIST WAS A LARGE VOTE-GETTER AMONG STUDENTS. NEVERTHELESS, ATTENTION TO THE ELECTORAL RESULTS FAST DISAPPEARED FROM THE PAGES OF THE COMMUNIST PRESS INDICATING THE DISAPPOINTMENT WHICH THE PCI FELT OVER THE SHOWING OF LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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THEIR LISTS. AT THE VERY LEAST, THE RESULTS PRESUMABLY HAD
SOME IMPACT IN THE THINKING OF PCI LEADERS AS THEY
FACED THE DILEMMA OF JUST HOW HARD TO PUSH FOR A GOVERNMENT
OF NATIONAL EMERGENCY IN THE CURRENT PERIOD OF POLITICAL
CRISIS. END COMMENT. GARDNER

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